

1 Peter 3:1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

² as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

³ Your adornment must not be *merely* external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

⁴ but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

⁵ For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands;

⁶ just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

⁷ You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

In I Peter 2 God told us that citizens are to submit to government and slaves to masters. Now, in 3:1-7 He introduces a third category of submissiveness - that of wives to their husbands.

The word "submit" is used in the context of a hierarchy (see notes under 2:18) where one is in a position of authority over another; in no instance are these roles ever reversed. Nevertheless, submission in the Bible doesn't imply inequality, unimportance, less dignity or honor. The Son submitted to the Father, and through His submission glorified God, but the Bible is clear that they are to receive equal honor, dignity, etc. Though wives are to submit to their husbands, this should never be construed as reflecting inferiority.

The purpose for a wife's submission is spelled out in 3:1 and 2; namely, that through her respectful behavior, an unbelieving (or disobedient) husband would be won to the Lord.

In the historical context it is probable that many women would be married to unbelieving husbands, for Christianity had just come into existence and many who came to faith were already in relationships that previously existed. In general, believing in Jesus caused divisions in families (Matt. 10:34-36), for Christians abandoned the family gods and were seen as social outcasts, bringing disgrace upon all who were associated with them. It became even more important in this setting that the splendor of Christ be plainly seen through the behavior of Christian wives.

Verses 3 and 4 focus on the wife's inward beauty. Braiding the hair, wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses are not sinful in themselves, but are mentioned to illustrate what Peter means by external adornment. He is not condemning beauty, but reminds wives of what kind of beauty brings glory to God; namely, "the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit."

To be gentle means that someone is not insistent on their own rights, not pushy, selfishly assertive, or demanding of their own way (Grudem, 148). This particular Greek word is used in only two other places in the Bible, in both instances of Christ. Gentleness is appropriate for all Christians, but especially necessary for those under authority where over-assertion can be construed as disrespect of authority.

The quiet trust in God that Peter speaks of is displayed in the life of Sarah in the OT (I Pet. 3:5-6). The example of Sarah is appropriate for she is the mother of all who have faith (Isa. 51:2 cf. Gal. 4:22-26), as

Abraham is the Father of all who believe (Ro. 4:16). Sarah exemplifies the proper attitude of a believing wife in her respect toward Abraham. The fact that she called him “lord” demonstrated the depth of the respect she had for her husband. In a similar way Paul says, “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). The reason wives can respond to even disobedient husbands with such respect is because by doing so they are submitting to Christ’s call on their lives to respect those in authority.

Verse 7 addresses the husband’s use of authority. Peter commands men to live with their wives “in an understanding way;” literally, “in a way in accordance with knowledge.” Peter does not specify what this knowledge is, but it is most probably living in accordance with the knowledge of God’s expectations for them in marriage and reflecting the love of Christ toward their wives (cf. Eph. 5:24-28).

The husband is also to remember that she (literally, “the feminine one” – a rare word) is weaker. “Weak” could mean that she is physically weaker, or that she, as the one told to submit, is in the more vulnerable position to be abused. In either case, the husband should not take advantage of his wife but treat her with love, kindness, and dignity as a fellow heir of the grace of life. Not to do so would be sin and a hindrance to one’s prayers.

NOTE: To many Americans the Bible seems obsolete; to others, especially in the feminist movement, it is a book bound by culture that was dominated by males. Even many Christian women today insist that the headship of men is not part of God’s original design, but is a result of the fall of man. However, the Bible is abundantly clear that male headship is part of God’s original design for male/female relationships. Though sin undoubtedly distorts these relationships and leads both parties to pervert their God-given responsibilities, sin is not the cause of male headship.

Male Headship Before the Fall

The creation of woman from man demonstrates that God made man and woman with an “inseparable unity and fellowship of life” (K & D, 89) and establishes the unity of the race from one ancestor. It also demonstrates equal dignity, for both man and woman are made in the image of God. But Genesis 1 and 2 also reveal a distinction in roles as well. Man is portrayed as the leader, and the woman as his companion. This, of course, has nothing to do with his ability or superiority; it is simply the design of humanity as God intended it.

1. The ***order of creation*** indicates male headship. Adam was created first, then Eve (Gen. 2:7, 18-23). See 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 11:8.

In Timothy and Corinthians, Paul grounds his exhortation concerning the male-female relationship in the order of creation. He could easily have linked it to the Fall, but does not. He explicitly links it with the original creation of male and female in the image of God.

In I Timothy it says, “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. *For it was Adam who was first created*, and then Eve.” Later in I Corinthians it states, “*man was not created for the woman’s sake; but woman for the man’s sake*” (I Cor 11:8, 9; cf. 1 Tim 2:13). In other

words, the time and purpose of the woman's creation is significant. Eve was created to labor beside Adam, but from the beginning she was to participate as a subordinate in rank.

2. The **events of the narrative** in Genesis also reveal that Adam was given his position of leadership, responsibility, and authority prior to the creation of Eve (Gen 2:15).

- He alone was commanded to "cultivate" and "keep" the garden.
- He was the one God told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is assumed that he then instructed Eve.
- In the Bible, giving names is the prerogative of a superior. After Eve's creation, Adam named her (Gen. 2:23; cf. Gen. 1:5, 8, 10; 2:19, 20, 23). In conjunction with her name, Adam also gives a title to his wife in Gen 3:20, and specifies her function as "the mother of all living." These actions give further evidence of his authority.
- Eve was created as a helper for Adam, not Adam as a helper for Eve (Gen. 2:18; cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9).
- Adam was given the responsibility of leaving his mother and father and cleaving to his new wife (Gen 2:24), not Eve.
- God named the human race "man", not "woman" (Gen. 1:26, 27 cf. Gen. 5:1-2). [The word "Adam" and "man" are the same word in Hebrew (אָדָם *adam*)] This suggests that he occupies the position as head of the relationship.

Male Headship After the Fall

The Bible everywhere assumes male leadership (every key leader in the OT is male, every priest had to be a male, the firstborn male had the prominent role in the family, all the OT prophets and NT writers were male, the disciples were male, the NT apostles were male, elders in the church and pastors must be male, etc.). Those who deny male headship insist that this is the result of the curse after the Fall, not God's design. They further argue that the effects of the Fall have been rolled back by Christ and thus Paul obliterated gender distinctions by declaring in Galatians 3:28 "There is neither . . . male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

However, in Galatians 3:28, God isn't addressing the roles in society; He is referring to the fact that we are all spiritual equals in Christ. Men are justified by faith alone, so are women. Both share the same blessings (see my notes on Galatians for more details).

Although I believe there is ample evidence to demonstrate that there were role distinctions *before the Fall*, the curse in Genesis 3:16 needs to be examined as well.

Genesis 3:16 To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."

What makes this verse so difficult is that it is unclear what the writer means by "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you".

Though in recent years there have been many interpretations (specifically due to the gender wars), I feel that there are two that are most probable:

VIEW 1: The desire of the woman is to control her husband. The curse is in that the harmony that was to exist in marriage is now marred by the wife wanting to rule and they will now experience conflict as a result of it.

VIEW 2: The woman's desire for her husband is a good desire, but her husband will exercise his headship as ungodly domination because of his sinful nature. In this view, the curse is in the hardship the wife will endure under ungodly rule.

SOLUTION:

The Hebrew word translated as "desire" appears only 3X in the OT: here in Genesis 3:16 and in two other places.

a) It is used of the healthy attraction (the desire) between a man and a woman in Solomon 7:10. Therefore, some see the woman's desire for her husband in Genesis 3:16 as a compensation for the pain she would experience in childbirth, not part of the curse.

b) In Genesis 4:7 it speaks of sin's "desire" to dominate or control Cain. Hence, others believe that the woman's desire in Genesis 3:16 would be the desire to dominate her husband. Instead of coexisting in peace, the husband will rule over her.

The closest text in the Bible in the form and logic of Genesis 3:16 is Genesis 4:7b which probably gives us a clue in how to interpret it.

Genesis 4:7 depicts Cain in the midst of a struggle with sin. The Lord said regarding his sin, "Sin is lying at the door; and ***its desire is for you, but you must master it.***" In other words, the desire of sin will overcome Cain if he does not master it.

The emphasis of "desire" is "a desire to possess." In this case, the meaning of "desire," would indicate that sin's desire for Cain is "a passionate, longing, craving appetite for ownership." (Stitzinger; Genesis 1-3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship; Grace Theological Journal 2.1 (1981) 43).

To paraphrase and amplify the sense: "Sin has a desire, Cain. It wants to control you. But you must not allow sin to have its way with you. You must rule over it."

The parallel that people see to Genesis 3:16 is this:

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| Sin's desire is for Cain. | That is, sin desires to rule him. | But Cain must master it. |
| Eve's desire is for Adam. | That is, she desires to rule him. | But Adam must rule her. |

Therefore, if the same meaning applies to Genesis 3:16, it would be saying that Eve's desire would be to control her husband; nevertheless, he would rule over her. Eve was created to be Adam's helpmeet (Gen. 2:20), to compliment and complete him. The two were to become one flesh (Gen. 2:24), and fulfill the will of God together by filling the earth and exercising dominion over it (Gen. 1:28). Though the woman would be subject to her husband, it would not be noticed for there would be no desire for things

to be different. Now, however, at a most fundamental level, the woman's sinful desires would cause disharmony. She would desire to rule her husband, but her husband would rule her.

Although this interpretation is possible, it has some problems which cause me to lean toward the second view.

In the second view, the problem isn't with the woman's desire, but in that the man "will carry his headship to domination because of his depraved nature. While this aspect of the curse primarily refers to the husband and wife, it can also refer to men and women outside of the context of marriage where role relationships exist." (Stitzinger)

"Almost every husband, or even most men in general, who have exercised leadership over women have used their position to domineer at one point or another. Paul continually reminds men not to "rule" over their wives in this negative fashion (Eph. 5:25-30; Col. 3: 19; cf. 1 Pet. 3:7-9; see also an inference concerning all men in 1 Cor. 11:11-12 as to how they should treat women). If a man is controlled by the Spirit, he may to some extent rise above the downward drag of his depravity and thus nullify the effects of this aspect of the curse." (Stitzinger).

In other words, the curse for Eve's transgression is that though women are still to be subject to their husbands, they will now suffer at the hands of husbands who abuse their leadership.

Male Headship in the NT

1. In the NT, ***Adam, not Eve, is seen as the representative head of the human race***. See 1 Cor. 15:22, 45-49; Rom. 5:12ff. .

- In Romans 5:12 it says, **"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."**

Romans 5 says nothing of Eve who also sinned, because she was not the head of the human race, so her eating of the forbidden tree did not represent anyone other than herself.

Adam was the cause of all men becoming sinners, for it was through Adam that sin invaded the human race. "Death (the punishment for sin) spread to all men because all have sinned" (5:12b). If Paul had stopped with that observation, we would be left with the impression that death is deserved because we sin just as Adam did. But Paul's comments in the following verses make it abundantly clear that our connection to Adam is much closer than imitating his sinful behavior (Harrison, 61). Verse 15 says, "by the one man's offense many died." Verse 16 states that "the judgment came from one man's offense." Furthermore, Paul says, death reigned through Adam (5:17), by Adam's sin "judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation" (5:18), and by his disobedience "many were made sinners" (5:19). Although strange to the western mind, the sin of Adam is viewed by God as a sin of all of mankind, and death is a result of his transgression (see Murray, Romans, 183-186). In other words, Adam's sin was regarded as ours in the same way that an ambassador represents a country or the vote of a senator represents the will of his constituents. Although we did not literally or actually sin when he did, there is solidarity within the human race in Adam. The concept is parallel to that of II Corinthians 5:14 where Paul, in speaking of

Christ, says “. . . if One died for all, then all died.” Adam is the representative of humanity, just as Christ is of the redeemed.

- In I Corinthians 11:3, Paul asserts that man is the head (*κεφαλή*) over the woman.

“ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

The meaning of "head" in v. 3 doesn't mean that man is the source or origin of the woman, but is indicative of man's "rank" over her. "His statement is not ascribing a deficiency in intellect or ability of the woman, but is designating her to a subordinate position in function"(Stitzinger).

2. Secondly, the apostle makes use of the term "to be subject" (*ὑποτάσσω*) to describe the relationship of the female to the male both in and outside the context of marriage (1 Cor 14:34-35; Eph 5:21, 22, 24; Co1 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11-14; Titus 2:5). The term "to be subject" (from the verb *τασσώ*) has a background in military usage, namely, that soldiers were appointed or placed in positions under others." *ὑποτάσσω* carries the meaning "to place under," "to affix under" or "to subordinate oneself to the control of another"(Stitzinger).

3. The salvation that comes with Christ in the New Testament reaffirms the creation order (Col. 3:18-19). Nothing in the NT suggests that male headship has been reversed by the work of Christ or that it cannot co-exist with full moral and spiritual equality between men and women.

4. According to Ephesians 5:31-32, marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church *from the beginning* (Eph. 5:31-32, citing Gen. 2:24). Christ is the head, the church is the bride who is submissive to Him.

5. A final support for a role distinction is expressed in 1 Pet 3:1, 5 -7. Concurring with Paul, Peter uses the term "submission" to describe the position of a wife toward her husband. While he does not refer to creation, he does use the example of Sarah's relationship to Abraham. It is fairly certain that her relationship to Abraham stems from the divine order of creation in Gen 2:18-24. Furthermore, while Peter discloses the wife as the "weaker vessel" in rank, he also maintains that she is spiritually an equal ("fellow-heir of the grace of life," 1 Pet 3:7).

A significant contrast sheds light upon the role relationship of Abraham and Sarah and that of Adam and Eve. In Gen 3: 17, Adam is condemned by God for "listening to" or "obeying" the voice of his wife. In Gen 21: 12, Abraham is told to "listen to" or "obey" the voice of Sarah. Peter indicates that Sarah was submissive to her husband, calling him "lord." The use of the verb "obey" to condemn and condone the same activity poses an apparent contradiction. This contrast is explained when the total picture is examined.

Two different conditions are presented in these contexts. It is suggested that Eve received her knowledge of the command not to eat of the fruit through the instruction of her husband. Eve's encouragement to her husband to partake of the fruit was an act of insubordination.

Furthermore, when Adam chose to eat of the fruit, he ignored his leadership role and followed his wife's sinful promptings. God's condemnation of Adam for obeying his wife is justified.

It should not be concluded from this passage that men must reject the voice of their wives in all situations. Gen 21:12 provides a blueprint for the correct role relationship between husband and wife. Abraham was distressed at the thought of expelling Hagar and Ishmael. Sarah realized the full implications of not expelling them, however, and thus encouraged her husband along these lines. When Abraham's mind would not be changed, God corrected him by telling him to listen to the voice of his wife. The key is found in that once Abraham was corrected by the Lord, he took the initiative to exert leadership (v 14). Unlike Adam, he did not ignore his role as head of the relationship and follow a course of cognizant error prompted by his wife. Sarah can thus be viewed by Peter as a woman who "obeyed her husband, calling him lord," yet provided advice in a submissive role (Stitzinger).